

PREVENTION: ALWAYS BETTER THAN CURE THE GREENS' PLAN TO SUPPORT HEALTH FROM CHILDHOOD AND BEYOND



Good health starts at birth, and it's a lifelong project. Despite some progress, we've failed to bring an epidemic of preventable disease under control in Victoria, and in some areas, we're going backwards. The Greens have a plan to refocus on preventative health, supporting good health from childhood and throughout life.

When it comes to protecting our health, prevention is always better than cure. Victoria is facing some huge health challenges that are causing hurting Victorians and putting a huge strain on our already stretched health system. Despite progress in certain areas, around 37,000 cancer diagnoses per year are directly caused by smoking, UV radiation, body weight, poor diet and alcohol.ⁱ

The rate of childhood obesity in Victoria is growing faster than anywhere else in Australia. Almost a third of Victorian children are overweight or obese and the figure is even higher for adults – around two thirds. Nearly 4,000 cases of cancer each year in Australia are related directly to obesity, and 7,000 to poor diet and a lack of physical activity. In Victoria, obesity costs up to \$800 million every year in excess healthcare costs alone.

In 2016, smoking killed more Victorians than alcohol and drug overdoses, transport accidents, falls and accidental injuries, murder and intentional self-harm combined.

We're incredibly fortunate to live in a country with beautiful beaches and weather that's perfect for outdoor play, adventure and exercise. But with that comes a huge risk of skin cancer, and research shows that we're not doing nearly enough to protect ourselves.

Unhealthy habits often start in childhood and that's where we need to be working with children, parents and communities to make a change. Failing to do this will result in decades of poor health, pain and even death that no child or family wants or should have to deal with.

The Victorian Greens know that health prevention programs can support people to make lifestyle changes, leading to healthier and happier lives. We need to support healthy habits from birth, throughout childhood and into adulthood. A significant boost to preventative health is critical to achieving this.

And it makes huge economic sense – reducing rates of preventable illness and saving lives will save Victorian taxpayers billions of dollars that our health system currently spends on responding to health crises.ⁱⁱ

The Victorian Greens will:

- **Restrict advertising of sugary drinks and junk food targeted at children**
- **Get sugary drinks and confectionery out of schools, hospitals and healthcare services**
- **Invest \$15 million per year in public information and education to reduce preventable diseases**

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CURB DAMAGING ADVERTISING TO KIDS

For too long, we've ignored the huge influence that the junk food and drinks industry have in government. As a society we've worked hard to reduce rates of smoking by banning tobacco advertising and limiting its visibility in shops. But the junk food and sugary drinks industries still wield a huge amount of power and influence, and Labor and Liberal have failed to place similar limitations on that.

These companies pump huge amounts of money into understanding who's most susceptible to advertising and product placement in shops, and when we're most likely to make unhealthy decisions. Children are an important target for advertising, and these companies understand how to put pressure on parents to make unhealthy purchases.

Unsurprisingly, the research proves how effective these strategies are. Evidence shows that children exposed to junk food add consume extra calories compared to those not exposed, which would over time lead to excess weight gain.ⁱⁱⁱ Parents know this too; the vast majority (88%) believe junk food marketing undermines their efforts to help children make healthy choices.

Federally we are committed to reform in TV advertising and sports promotion. In Victoria, the Greens would strengthen current restrictions on advertising alcohol and extend these restrictions on advertising to include junk food. We would also phase out junk food advertising from children's sport.

GETTING SUGARY DRINKS AND CONFECTIONERY OUT OF SCHOOLS AND HEALTH SERVICES

Our schools and healthcare services should provide a supportive environment for children and families to make healthy choices. There's widespread support for

restricting unhealthy products in educational and health institutions^{iv} from the institutions themselves, public health experts and parents.

Sugary soft drinks and confectionery have been banned in public schools for nearly ten years, but lack of effective enforcements mean that not all schools are compliant. Victorian organisations like Barwon Health, YMCA Victoria, the City of Greater Geelong, the Alfred Hospital and Australian Catholic University have all taken action to phase out or restrict availability of sugary drinks.

The Greens applaud these locally driven initiatives, but what we really need is some strong leadership from government. NSW last year became the first state to ban sugary drinks from hospitals and health services, and Queensland has followed suit, extending restrictions to include unhealthy snacks. It's time the Victorian Government stood up to the powerful beverages industry and acted in the interests of children, families and communities.

The Greens would put in place an effective ban on sugary drinks and confectionery in all public schools, hospitals and health services. We will also undertake work to identify mechanisms for reducing the availability of sugary drinks in children's sports, other government institutions and workplaces.

At a federal level we will continue to push for a sugary drink tax and restrictions on advertising sugary drinks and junk food during peak viewing time for children and young people.

INVEST IN PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Victoria has made some real progress in reducing behaviours that contribute to cancer and other preventable diseases over the past decade. But the rates of preventable cancer and chronic disease remain unacceptably high. They're causing unnecessary poor



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health and death, and they're putting a huge strain on our health system.

One of the best ways of addressing this problem is sustained investment in public information and education campaigns. These are tried and tested methods that are proven to increase knowledge and healthy behaviours relating to a range of dangerous practices and preventable diseases.

The Greens will invest \$15 million per year ongoing for public information and engagement campaigns to increase Victoria's rate of bowel cancer screening, reduce rates of smoking, and to encourage healthier lifestyles while reducing rates of obesity. Campaigns would be delivered in partnership with the community sector and specialist agencies with a proven track record in these areas.

ⁱ David C. Whiteman, Penelope M. Webb, Adele C. Green et al, 'Cancers in Australia in 2010 attributable to modifiable factors: introduction and overview', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, October 2016:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/17536405/39/5>

ⁱⁱ DA Cadilhac, A Magnus, T Cumming, L Sheppard, D Pearce, R Carter, 'The health and economic benefits of reducing disease risk factors', VicHealth Briefing Note, 2009:

<https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/health-and-economic-benefits-of-reducing-disease-risk-factors>

ⁱⁱⁱ Jennifer Norman, Bridget Kelly, Emma Boyland et al, 'Children's self-regulation of eating provides no defense against television and online food marketing', *Appetite*, Volume 125, 1 June 2018:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019566631731735X>

^{iv} 'Leading organisations call for genuine reformulation, not a sales pitch', Rethink Sugary Drink media release, 25 June 2018: <http://www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au/media/leading-health-groups-call-for-genuine-reformulation.html> 'A comprehensive policy program to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages in Australia', Obesity Coalition, 2015:

<http://www.opc.org.au/downloads/policy-briefs/reduce-sugary-drinks-in-australia.pdf>

'Dentists welcome school soft drink bans', ADAVB media release, 24 April 2006: <http://www.adavb.net/Portals/0/MediaRelease/ADAVB-Media-Release-2006-04-24.pdf>